

The Collector



hen Ron Lyons was growing up in a post-WWII Edmonton neighbourhood, he didn't know anybody who golfed. Then, 20 years ago he and his real estate partner reclaimed an old gravel pit on the North Saskatchewan and began building The Legends Golf and Country Club.

Today Ron knows and has played with thousands of golfers but, amongst that multitude, there are only a handful who share his passion for a round played with authentic hickory shafted clubs.

To decorate The Legends clubhouse, Ron began buying golf memorabilia, and, before he knew it, he had a serious addiction. Today his collection of balls, clubs, tees, books, and assorted course equipment takes up the lower floor of his home, and he has donated hickory clubs and displays to numerous tournaments and organizations.

The First Canadian Hickory Championships

"First I started collecting the hickory clubs, then I started playing with them," he says, describing his path to hosting the first Canadian Open Hickory Championships in 2005.

The championship drew 50 Canadian entries, 11 American and one British. Sherwood Park's Ross Kenny defeated Randy Jensen of Omaha on the final day of the three-day tournament which included team events.

The popularity of hickory play using pre-1935 clubs has grown steadily throughout the world in the past decades. Today, Ron is often called upon to help host tournaments in which players compete with hickory over entire courses, or just one or two holes of each round.

Ron, a lively and extremely engaging speaker, is able to talk for an entire morning as he explains the significance of each item in his collection.

Teeing Up On Sand Mounds

Within minutes he transports you back to the day when players teed up on mounds of sand – he has the most complete collection of sand moulds known today – and club pros spent their winters reshaping broken clubs with old growth hickory.

With near reverence he lays out his favourites, many with features that would make them illegal for play today. Some have adjustable heads that change their pitch, and others have experimental grooving. "Bobby Jones preferred his irons to hold a little rust," he notes.

Stamped With Symbols And Names

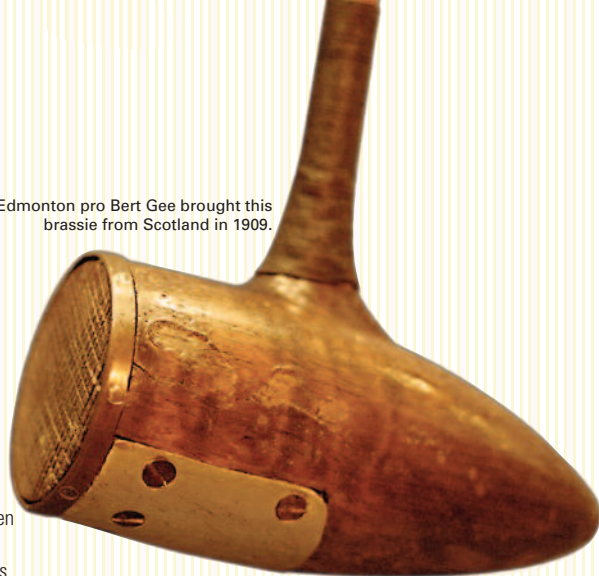
Like heirloom silver identified by a silvermaker's hallmark, the old heads are individually stamped with symbols and names that authenticate their origins.

Early Alberta pros, until the rise in popularity of steel shafted clubs in the 1930's, would buy heads from Scotland, add their own stamp, and then attach the shafts and grips in their shops.

Early Alberta Pros

Today, these heads have a special significance to Ron and other collectors because they carry the names of well-known Alberta pros of the hickory era such as Bert Gee who, from 1919 to 1949, was the pro at Edmonton's Victoria Golf Course.

Edmonton pro Bert Gee brought this brassie from Scotland in 1909.



Most of the province's first pros came from the British Isles where clubmaking was an art passed from generation to generation, Ron explains.

"The Alberta pros imported those heads, especially the Scottish ones, and rarely bought the American mass-produced ones that they considered to be of lower quality."

As Ron's enthusiasm grows in the telling of the stories from the hickory era it is not hard to imagine him standing on the first tee at the Victoria course dressed in plus fours. His bramble-patterned Haskell ball is teetering on a mound of sand. He begins his backswing and, for one brief moment, Bert Gee's stamp flashes in the sun.

Now, that's a golfing thrill!



Ron Lyons turned The Legends Golf and Country Club into a shrine to golf history focusing on players and equipment.



Ron Lyons's ever-expanding collection includes everything from tee sand moulds to hickory clubs with heads that would be outlawed today to horse shoe boots intended to lessen the impact by maintenance animals on golf course turf.

Shaun and Renee Photographers